



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

MUSIC'S MOTHER-TONE AND TONAL ONOMATOPY.

PRELUDE.

OBERVE how the whole orchestral throng clusters about her; caresses her: how the mischievous little bows catch up her apron-string and prance out with it, then come back and loll at her knee, and look up into her eyes, and whisper her name; how the clarinets seize and sound that name deeply, then scurry with it along the tone-fence, pretending that they are going to jump off, as do those orchestral big boys—the *contra-bassi*; how the 'celli-bows first give it an inflection of filial love, then utter a sigh of romantic susceptibility, as they saunter towards the tone-bridge, over which they seem ready to vault at beauty's command; how the lowing horns echo that name; how magically it makes the fiery trumpets, the phlegmatic trombones, and even those orchestral athletes—the prosaic bass-drums—as well as the chattering group of aspiring flutes and pert piccolos and cry-baby *hautboys* and quacking fagottos properly decorous in the midst of their wildest fun, the surge and swirl of which only the master's baton can hush, with its apparently unwelcome signal for taking up their respective burdens of labor and care.

This hush often makes me wish—as did that Eastern potentate, who found this topsy-turvy, seething mass of sounds so indescribably charming—to *encore* it.

* * *

Music's mother-tone is man's mother-tone; the original vowel sound, the primitive A (Ah)—the first, simplest, easiest of all vocal

utterances : the onomatopic vocable for mother. Man, to intensify its love-symbolism in verbal expression, gave it the verbo-consonantal prefix, M—Ma : and children verbally melodised and sweetened this symbolism by iteration—Mama.

Good examples of the use of Ma may be found in the simple, verbo-tonal, slumbersome lullabies of the primitive Esquimaux.

Man idealised the mother-tone in tonal speech by adding thereto tonal consonants, chosen because of their being onomatopic of his numerous mother-needs ; and, as the demands of his varied emotions for æsthetic media of musical utterance grew, he sought for other tone-vowels, consonants, tone-combinations, tone-sequences, until these tone-language materials joined, blended with each other, took shape, coherence, symmetry, and music became his vernacular tongue.

Naturally onomatopy has had much to do with this musical evolution ; as, with its simple cries, men everywhere naturally express their feelings ; which cries, as the crying one's desire to be heeded by the listener increases in intensity ; or, as one phase of his emotion merges into another, are reduplicated, inflected, or joined to other sounds within his vocal command, in alliterative concord or otherwise, for the purpose of deepening the impression of the affection to which he is then giving vocal utterance, upon the listener ; and that in tones, phrases, strains, tone-movements, of whatsoever kind they may be, this onomatopic element must be present, if we would have the tone-language closely, correctly, intimately, satisfactorily subserve its purpose as such.

The mere mechanical reiteration of the name of the Vaishnavic god, Hari, in which the A-tone is chief, secures admission to the Vishnu's heaven.

In the early Hebrew tonal accents and indeterminate notation we find numerous onomatopic suggestions which are clearly in line with and illustrative of the originally tentative condition of the tone-language ; this notation of a flexible tonality allowing of as widely different tonal interpretations, changes, as does, verbally, the Aryan tongue, from which sprang the Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, German ; and our own copious English has more sounds than symbols. The

wonderfully intellectual Egyptians, by their use of an indeterminate notation, confessed their need for a notation other than that whose signs are of fixed notes, as well as for tonal onomatopy; and Moses doubtless obtained suggestions, through his musical culture in the Pharaonic court, which caused the Hebrews to meet the onomatopic exigencies in their song-services by their indeterminate notation, with its oral amendments, qualifications, accents, thereby rendering their music so variable, that—chameleon-like—it took the tone-color of whatever land they sojourned in,—a habit initiated by their Egyptian captivity.

Man etherealised the verbal with the tonal, artistically, and extended, when so doing, onomatopy from the spoken to the sung; causing it, naturally, to dominate the constructive art-growth and scientific evolution of music, its essence being the unobstructed semblance of sound to sense; a semblance vastly superior to that of words, because unembarrassed by verbal dross.

Read this fine verbo-onomatopic excerpt from Southey:—

“ How does the water
Come down at Lodore?
Rising and leaping,
Sinking and creeping,
Dividing and gliding and sliding,
And falling and brawling and sprawling,
And bubbling and troubling and doubling,
And rushing and flushing and brushing and gushing,
And flapping and rapping and clapping and slapping,
And thumping and plumping and bumping and jumping,
And dashing and flashing and splashing and clashing,
All at once and all o'er, with a mighty uproar—
And this way the water comes down at Lodore.”

Then turn to Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony: scan its scenery, hear its deep, fine-thoughted voices, all marvellously true; truer than Southey's words, or even Rembrandt's visualistic colors.

The presence and power of onomatopy in music, wherein it exceeds in importance music's other rudiments, are as self-evident as are its presence and power, as a formative principle in other lan-

guages. To it pre-eminently indeed may be accredited music's tenacious hold on man and its profound effectiveness ; and to that degree in which music is onomatopoeic does it serve its lingual design, and as a medium for the utterance of sentiment. It is that principle from which that tone-form which individualises, nationalises music springs, flowers, and to which we must look for a key to the primitive, radical, individual and national characteristics of music.

The inspiration of its formative power in the construction of musical expressions is easily established by analysis thereof ; particularly of those which are primitive and precede all acoustic science, and are unburthened or refined by the adornments of musical art, or the culture of those musicians who use them : they not being the composite heritage of many and diverse languages—a Babel—but the utterances of the original, primitive, virgin voice of man, as unchanged by the lapse of time as are man's five senses ; these utterances evidencing the ever-present operation of their primitive impulses and of man's common imitative faculties.

They show themselves to be the tone-germs from which are evolved the endless varieties of musical composition ; germs found not only in the voice of man but in the voices of the animal kingdom at large.

The mother-tone A, with the Ma, Ba, of every baby ; white or black ; bond or free ; born of ignorant or learned parents ; of the baby of all nations under the sun : this cry of lamb, kid, calf, with its feline and canine modifications, is one of those germs ; one which expresses a crying desire, the immediate satisfying of which is sought.

This cry takes its start from the mother-tone A, whose musical notation is placed on the second space of the treble staff. This mother-desire being common among children, this mother-tone, with its consonants, their inflections and dynamic changes, becomes onomatopoeic ; first of babyhood, then of mother-love, mother-longing, home-love, home-longing, love to others and of its cognate affections.

Observe how the composer of the melody of "The Last Rose of

Summer," or, of that of "Home, Sweet Home," does loving obeisance to the mother-tone.

Let the reader try to sing or play either of these songs, with some other tone substituted for A, if he would realise practically its vital importance in their melodic structure; and how the foster-spirit of the mother-tone extends naturally in melodic construction, by tonal transposition,—as in the melody of "Annie Laurie"; and how it pervades all tonal matter by the operation of a basic law of tonal mammalogy. Search the musical scriptures; study the phrasings of passion in operas, for evidences of the debt dramatic music owes to onomatopy; illustrations of which cannot well be produced here, excepting by the use of music-staff, clef, notation; but which, whoever is interested therein may entertain himself rarely by finding in the works of Wagner, Verdi, and other emotional geniuses. From the works of these modern composers let him go back, step by step, to the primitive, simply formed music of all peoples, and mark how—through onomatopy and its tonal affinities—this music is unified; and how, in the mother tone and its onomatopy, however deeply imbedded, lies the secret of music's universal heart-sway. This tonal protoplast and its multitudinous progeny—their art, first empirical, then scientific—are so cadenced in the works of such composers as Beethoven and Wagner as to produce in the listener's mind pictures of their ideals etherealised to that degree which no art but music can reach.

The word-creations of Homer, Shakespeare, and Dante abound in verbal onomatopy. Yet their noble sonorities cannot be said to attain that influence over the reader or listener which the tonal masterpieces of Beethoven, Wagner, or Berlioz, effect.

As Mr. Gladstone assigns those poets chief honors for verbal onomatopy, I would cite these three composers as their worthy onomatopic brothers; the compositions of no others appearing to me to show a profounder knowledge of phonology, nor the carrying of tonal onomatopy further towards the state of an exact science. The more these tone-masters' works are studied, in an onomatopic regard, the more do these masters seem to tacitly confess their being hindered, in the use of tonal onomatopy by the imperfections in,

and limitations of, the present system of musical notation ; and to sigh for one like unto that of the Egyptians or Hebrews, in indeterminateness.

Fortunately for the modern music-lover they had none ; for where is the musical genius who could rightly interpret their unexpressed accents ?

As the composer's thoughts are too idealistic to content themselves with the expressional resources of any verbal tongue, though never so perfect ; they, being wholly divested from the earthy in conception, necessarily chafe under the restraints of this notation, in their endeavors to lead the music-lover from the phenomenal to the real.

The composer is an Orpheus, who proposes to satisfy himself with no accomplishment short of compelling earth's stocks and stones to live, move, and have their being at the sovereign command of his genius. Why did Wagner set his words to music, if not failing to find in words those æsthetic media in which music is so opulent ? And why does he exclaim—in the midst of even his tone-wealth, with Saint Paul—"except these bonds ?" Wagner reached from words to tones, as did Rossetti from words to tints, and to a perfect freedom of tonal expression ; no composer evidencing in his works more than he a desire for a fixed notation which recognises closer, nicer sound differences than does the present one ;—an enharmonic notation—with all the instruments of the orchestra constructed to produce them ; one rendering the influences of onomatopy on music freer and more powerful.

The tone-shading, onomatopic resources of the violin-class of instruments make of the orchestra, in this respect, a truer exponent of feeling than it would be otherwise ; and onomatopy ever strives to free our tone-scales from their arbitrary parcelling of tones into integers, in order to broaden and render truer the expressional powers of music for their employment in the domain of definite emotional ideas.

I find that all music, in which onomatopy dominates its phrasing ; in which the tone suits, or suggests, the voice which man instinctively gives to that sentiment which the music seeks to express,

is the truest, most effective; because it individualises the music and leads it to obey—in its construction—the common law of humanity, as betokened by the onomatopic mother-tone as well as by man's activity in all the fine and inventive arts. Such music as this manifestly cannot be made a vehicle for diametrically opposed feelings; and clearly is, therefore, of a higher excellence than that which—like a cab—may carry anybody. Such music as this also evidences the importance and power of onomatopy as a musical rudiment, and its dominance over the mother-tone and other single sounds in the musical alphabet, sound-combinations and sequences produced by the evolution of music as a language, begun with the primitive mother-tone utterance, followed by all those tonal developments which man's changing feelings require, as fit tokens for those feelings, and of those passions which call them into vocal utterance; through whose operation, under the guidance of a law like that of Darwin, all tonality may have its genesis, growth, and present stature.

This tonal dominance of onomatopy doubtless is due to its having preceded and being above tonal art; to its being the direct, natural, and, therefore, truest symbolism of feeling; to its being the primeval basis of all tonality; the fundamental principle in which all tonal effects agree; and, to establish which, its advocate has but to divest the tone-language from the shaping, smoothening, sweetening, refining, to which the musical culture of centuries has subjected it, and reveal therein its supremacy; the dominance of the principle of imitation, of an imitation which reaches beyond analogy, beyond vague, shadowy suggestiveness; one which is the essence, soul of that which is expressed through its operation; one showing music to be not unreal, fanciful tone-painting, abounding in the wanton reds of a Rubens, or splotched yellows of a Turner, but a living speech; a mother-tongue, seized of, quickened by that soul of which it is the material, subordinate body, and which uses it merely as such.

In music's present condition, however, ample evidence may be found to establish the theory of onomatopy as a *linguo-formative* principle, if to do so be desired. Tonal onomatopy's status clearly

being self-demonstrable, I think we may safely assign such tonal effects as we cannot, under the present conclusions of musical science, trace to its influence—for example, Wagner's dream-sounds—to the realm of unconscious onomatopy; the onomatopy of musical ideas of which we are seized, without being conscious thereof; yet which take an independent coincidence and consonance with—and color—our conscious ideas when we compose music; as well as their influences on the listener's heart and mind when he takes a similar conscious, or unconscious, cognisance of the onomatopic element of a musical strain, and of its own definite, fixed, uniform æsthetic impression; its peculiar expressional significance and objective value.

As a device for ordinary tone-analysis it would seem convenient to divide all tone-elements into two classes: the onomatopic, or psychic, the tone-soul;—and the unonomatopic, the tone-body; and to let this division be used when examining the genetic processes of tonality, and the uses of the tone-language; it being qualified by the patent fact that each of these tonal parts necessarily partakes, to a certain degree, of the peculiar properties of the other; and by the innate truth that neither part can any more be separated from the other and live here as an independent entity than can man's soul and body.

On passing from tone-genesis to tone-art, onomatopy surely is a substantial helper in solving the relations of tone-forms, tone-phrases and expressions to each other, and in guiding the student to their causes; demonstrating, as it does, the tonal truism that their mutual resemblances are due to their common inheritance; their differences to their respective environments. It is, furthermore, a valuable aid for him who would leave speculative hypothesis and experimentally seek for an exact, demonstrable basis for explicative musical science and scientific musical art, through its abundant and valuable data. For, in a word, onomatopy demonstrates the synthesis of man's heart with man's mind. And he who seeks for scientific exactness in every onomatopic datum doubtless will bear in mind the fact that there is ambiguity even in words—Dante's words; and that if critics wrangle over the meaning of

certain musical movements, they have ample excuse for so doing in literary disputes ; and for mutual charity in their onomatopic investigations, especially when seeking to reconcile onomatopy with music-form theories ; chiefly with that of the coining of form into music *ab extra*, or with that which assumes a strict equivalence of music-form with pictorial form ; with the inevitable inference that it imitates an existing prototype,—a prototype easily traceable through the most abstract conceptions to an onomatopic germ expressive of an emotion ; the patent weakness in such an equivalence lying in the truth that music-form gets closer to its prototype than picturing it ; that it voices, becomes its prototype ; is very thought of its very thought.

A safe conclusion to reach in the premises, touching the form-element, would be this : Music-form is the imitative instinct ruled by the solvent, selective, constructive mind.

* * *

The acceptance of this conclusion makes easy the belief that music's origin is in feeling, and that, therefore, music is not an art in which form is a mere mechanism to produce emotion ; but that, contrariwise, it is an art in which form is produced by emotion, under the discipline of the solvent, selective, constructive mind.

Practical onomatopy, with its far-reaching forces, is, in modern musical composition, a double-edged, exceeding sharp tonal sword ; one to be wielded only by the steady, cunning hand of genius. A facile task is it for a composer to carry such a means for æsthetic expression to a degree of stilted, ludicrous mannerism ; to so burden, bungle, and technically pervert its symbolism as to unmusic music and reduce it to the sound-chaos of a brute-thronged barnyard, in which a dog, or cat, ordinarily quick to distinguish a human voice, might go mad in its endeavor to recognise a tone having any human mind back of it. Notwithstanding this quality of onomatopy its study shows that in its tones, tone-combinations, tone-sequences, dwell the æsthetic media of all emotions which are proper tone-art subjects. The use of these media comes intuitively to the tone-genius, because they are the heart, the inner truth, the life of his

mother-tone and tongue. He idealises, etherealises them, and the metaphysical, high art-results captivate, chasten, elevate us; fill our old world-worn, world-wise souls with the purity of infant-life and of that melody which men first syllabled with the mother-tone A.

C. CROZAT CONVERSE.

HIGHWOOD, N. J.